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2010 Students and Scientists Internship Experience

This summer I was given the privilege by the Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition to be selected for an internship at Silent Spring Institute, along with two other students. The institution's name derives as an honor for a book written by Rachel Carson that introduced a different perspective of the environment and the health risks it may contain. Thus, Silent Spring is a non-profit organization that attempts to discover possible links between factors within the environment and the health effects that it may propose in perspective with breast cancer. Epidemiological studies are done annually throughout Massachusetts in order to test water samples to air particles in order to discover possible carcinogens, volatile organic chemicals, endocrine disruptors, and other plausible harmful components that may be a health risk. The research conducted not only identifies potential links, but also attempts to identify safer alternatives for consumers.

Throughout the course of my internship our mentor, Janet Ackerman, introduced a project to us in which we researched the information portrayed to average consumers about daily products. Furthermore, each of us was assigned various sites that we were to analyze the information being displayed and whether there was sufficient evidence to support their statements. While working on our project, we came across numerous products, such as cosmetics to deodorants, that various websites stated different conclusions of their potential health risks. In addition, we utilized two different online health rating systems, Good Guide and Skin Deep, which would be used to collect data for over two hundred different products provided by scientist Robin Dodson; these products ranged from cleaners to skin care. Along with the data collected we analyzed any possible correlation between the ratings and found a moderate correlation, indicating that sites provided similar ratings for some products while different for others.

Along with the issued project, Dr. Laurel Schaidler allowed us to do a nitrate water sample test on three various water samples from the Charles River. At the end of the two week period, all three of us interns had a PowerPoint presentation in front of the staff lead by Executive Director Dr. Julia Brody. The

presentation was followed by vigorous questions as well as suggestions on how to enhance our presentation and the information we portray. Working alongside professionals allowed me to obtain a glimpse of the work life while gathering as much useful information.

This amazing internship experience would not have come into fruition if it was not for the grant provided by Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition. The knowledge I have been taught throughout will be redirected to the community through presentations and outreaches in order to increase the awareness of breast cancer. The experience allowed me to develop an understanding of the field of breast cancer research through a different perspective of prevention rather than treatment.